

**Amherst Committee on Homelessness
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, February 4, 2009, 9:30 AM
First floor meeting room, Town Hall**

Present: Mr. Eddings, Mr. Giles, Ms. Greeney, Ms. Manire-Gatti (in part), Mr. Nelms (in part), Ms. Simula

Absent: None

Staff: Mr. Rosenblatt, Town liaison; Captain Gunderson, Amherst Police Department

Select Board liaison: Mr. Weiss (in part)

Citizens: Kevin Noonan, Warming Place volunteer coordinator

The meeting was called to order by chairperson Simula at 9:40 AM.

9:40 AM. Nominations for and election of Committee secretary

Ms. Greeney nominated Mr. Eddings, Mr. Nelms seconded, Mr. Eddings accepted. No other nominations were made. **The nomination was approved unanimously.**

9:42 AM. Review and approval of minutes of January 21, 2010 meeting

Ms. Greeney moved to accept the minutes without amendment. Ms. Simula seconded. **The motion was approved unanimously.**

9:45 AM. Comments by Captain Gunderson of the experiences to date of the Police Department with the Warming Place

Captain Gunderson reported that all Amherst police officers are aware of the location and hours of the Warming Place and how it is staffed. There have been eight references to the Warming Place in police reports since it opened on December 14, 2009, usually as referring an individual to it.

Mr. Rosenblatt said that the Warming Place will be open through April, pending funding.

Mr. Noonan noted the cooperation provided by the Police Department, First Baptist Church, and guests of the Warming Place. He stated that there have been problems involving guests, but none were major, and that police departments in surrounding towns know about the Warming Place.

Mr. Rosenblatt asked if there have been any major complaints to the police about the Warming Place, specifically from neighbors. Captain Gunderson replied that there have not, and added that the Chamber of Commerce, which unlike the Warming Place is open days, has not received complaints about the homeless since the Warming Place opened.

Ms. Greeney asked if it would be helpful to have police do a walk through each night around 12 PM as guests are settling in. Mr. Noonan suggested that 10 PM would be a better time as guests are already settled in by 12. Mr. Rosenblatt suggested police walk throughs are opportunities for them to “come and be friendly.” Ms. Greeney said that Warming Place staff can offer soup and a sandwich to officers doing walk throughs. Captain Gunderson stated that officers did walk throughs in the beginning, but it seemed “a non issue”. She offered to talk with her supervisor about resuming them, although

said they are unlikely on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights in April (because of increased calls involving students).

Ms. Greeney noted that a guest arrived last night with a head injury. She asked if police could have been called to assist in his treatment. Mr. Eddings noted that the Center for Human Development's (CHD) request for Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding mentions various trainings for staff and volunteers, including first aid and CPR. Mr. Noonan replied that this training is planned for the near future, and noted that there is a first aid kit at the Warming Place, although "it is from Home Depot." Mr. Rosenblatt asked about the presence of a cardiac defibrillator at the Warming Place. Mr. Noonan replied that there is not one, nor plans to provide one. Ms. Simula asked if police paramedics and EMT's can provide first aid at the Warming Place. Captain Gunderson replied yes, although she prefers that this be provided in-house when possible so police can respond to other emergencies. She noted that the 4-12 PM shift is staffed by three patrol officers: north-central, central, south-central.

Mr. Noonan stated that only one guest so far is known to have arrived with an IV needle, and commented on the desirability of putting such individuals in touch with *Tapestry Health*. The Warming Place is the only "wet" one in Hampshire county, he said, accepting everyone. Captain Gunderson stated that "this makes our job easier." Ms. Greeney said that the majority of guests are from Northampton, some having been turned away by the cot shelter there. "We have a reputation for being friendly", she said.

Mr. Nelms noted that Cathy Bennett has left her position as social worker with the Town and that a replacement needs to be found. He suggested Meg Wright as a contact person to whom individuals can be referred, noting that she is at the Survival Center from 12-5 PM on Thursdays.

10:15 PM. Warming Place update. Mr. Noonan stated that 32 different individuals have used the Warming Place to date. He believes that the absence of cots makes conditions more crowded and less orderly as individual belongings can become spread out and misplaced rather than stored under cots. Donated plastic barrels provided to each guest are helping. As visitation increases, he said some guests may become "claustrophobic".

10:25 AM. Mr. Nelms departed.

Hygiene and ventilation. Ms. Greeney raised the matter of hygiene and showers, noting that there is sometimes an odor in the Warming Place. She will amend the *Resource Guide* to note that guests of the Survival Center have the opportunity to shower at the Center, and will explore what opportunity there may be for guests of the Warming Place to shower there as well. Mr. Noonan will investigate opportunities for guests to shower and use the pool at the Boyden gym or elsewhere at the University. Mr. Eddings asked about building code requirements for air turnover at the Warming Place. Mr. Noonan replied that the building was built in the 1960's and thus may grandfathered out of present heating, ventilation, air conditioning requirements.

Evaluation of Services. Mr. Rosenblatt discussed evaluation of services provided by the Warming Place, noting that such assessments can be difficult. They typically have three components, he said:

- o Is the organization providing the services that it was contracted to provide?

- o How effectively are the services being provided?
- o What is the quality of the services?

He stated that involvement of guests/clients/consumers is important in assessments of the social services they receive.

Ms. Greeney agreed with the importance of involving Warming Place guests in an evaluation of the services provided to them and proposed an anonymous questionnaire/survey as a way to obtain their feedback. She offered to prepare such a survey for the Committee's next meeting, with input from Committee members. Mr. Eddings suggested that it is important to involve guests of the Warming Place in the preparation of the survey as well.

Food. Mr. Rosenblatt spoke of the importance of including a line item for food in the preparation of budgets for the Warming Place, and of the potential for individuals and organizations to donate food to the Warming Place.

Staff and volunteers. Ms. Greeney noted that the Warming Place is presently funded for one staff person per night and spoke of the importance of having both a male and female salaried staff work each night, which is currently the practice. She pointed out that the staffing line item in the CHD's CDBG shelter proposal might be insufficient as it appears to fund only one staff person per night. If so, Ms. Greeney said, then more than the \$55,000 requested in the proposal is needed. Mr. Rosenblatt noted that the Town is no longer using Waxman funding to house the homeless in hotel rooms, and will look into its availability for extending this funding for the purpose of continuing to staff the Warming Place each night with a male and female until it closes on April 30.

Mr. Noonan has observed that the level of use of the Warming Place by women drops following a disruption. He also noted that the availability of volunteer students is influenced by the academic calendar. Ms. Greeney noted that volunteers may be "free", yet they can be less reliable than staff and require time and effort to recruit and train.

10:55 AM. Select Board's proposal to merge the Committees on Housing Partnership-Fair Housing, Homelessness, and Community Development.

Ms. Simula stated that this proposal was discussed by the Select Board on January 25 before the Committee on Homelessness was aware of it and feels there is a need for the Committee to respond to it quickly. Mr. Giles noted that if the proposal passes, the change would not occur until July 1, 2010, which allows everyone sufficient time to consider it. Ms. Greeney proposed that the three Committees and their Select Board and staff liaisons meet to discuss the proposal and, if possible, prepare a joint recommendation to the Select Board.

11:12 AM. Ms. Manire-Gatti arrived.

Ms. Simula proposed that such a meeting be scheduled for Thursday, March 18th or Thursday, March 25th at 7PM, and so moved. Ms. Manire-Gatti seconded. **The motion was approved unanimously.** Mr. Rosenblatt asked Mr. Eddings to send him an e-mail of the motion as passed so that he can send it to the other Committees and liaisons. Mr. Eddings said he would do so.

11:18 AM. Center for Human Development's request for a Community Development Block Grant.

Ms. Greeney reminded the Committee that next year's need is for a "full fledged" homeless shelter with cots and showers. She noted that State regulations require that such a location have a sprinkler system.

11:20 AM. Mr. Weiss arrived.

Mr. Rosenblatt said he presently knows of no place that can meet these needs and requirements although the Town continues to search for one. Mr. Noonan stated that churches are the logical place to look. Mr. Rosenblatt noted that churches are exempt from some zoning regulations, though not from building codes. Mr. Noonan suggested the University might have such a location.

Mr. Rosenblatt noted that CDBG proposals are due on February 12, that a total of \$200,000 in 2010 CDBG funding is budgeted for social service activities, and that some of the \$20-25,000 in Waxman funds that remain might be available for the Warming Place. Mr. Noonan noted the difficulty in sustaining the Warming Place with available funding sources, and suggested that Amherst's federal and state representatives be approached for funding. Mr. Weiss stated that the funding necessary to fill this gap is not much, and suggested that Representative Story and Senator Rosenberg be approached for assistance. Mr. Noonan expressed a willingness to pursue the funding with Representative Story and Senator Rosenberg.

11:25 AM. Ms. Greeney moved to adjourn. Ms. Simula seconded. **The motion was approved unanimously.**

The next Committee meetings are scheduled for Thursday,
February 18;
March 4, 18 ;
April 1, 15, 29;
May 13, 27.

Respectfully submitted,

Kevin Eddings, Secretary